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REPORTS TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Draft report

UNFPA report

1. In introducing the report of the Executive Director to the Economic and Social Council (DP/FPA/1999/5), the Executive Director underscored the full commitment of UNFPA to all United Nations coordination and collaboration mechanisms. She stated that the Fund was a very active partner in the many processes by which coordination was pursued, either within the context of the entire United Nations system - through the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) mechanisms, the Secretary-General's Executive Committees, and notably the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) - or via a number of other consultations and arrangements, such as the recent high-level consultations between WHO and UNFPA. She emphasized that the Fund actively cooperated with all United Nations partners and civil society in helping to implement, in a coherent, complementary and integrated manner, the agreements reached at the United Nations global conferences of the 1990s.

2. Noting that the Economic and Social Council session in 1998 was a landmark in many ways, she drew the attention of the Executive Board to a number of highlights: the special session on an integrated follow-up to the United Nations global conferences of the 1990s; the far-reaching discussions on the triennial comprehensive policy review at the annual session of the Council; the decision to schedule a special session in May 1999 on basic indicators; and the adoption by the Council of key themes for 1999 that reflected the priorities of Member States, including the role of employment and work in poverty eradication, the empowerment and advancement of women and the development of Africa.

3. The Executive Director pointed out that the report to the Council covered a wide range of issues, including the triennial comprehensive policy review and its follow-up; progress on the reform of the Secretary-General; follow-up activities to the United Nations conferences, including the ICPD+5 review and assessment; the many initiatives being pursued within UNDG, including the

resident coordinator system; the question of resources for population programmes; and humanitarian/emergency operations. She drew attention to the section in the report focusing on the cooperation and collaboration among UNFPA and the Bretton Woods institutions and noted that the Fund had actively pursued consultations with the World Bank at both the headquarters and field levels. She observed that she had already discussed the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) under an earlier agenda item.

4. The Executive Director underscored that work was progressing well within the UNDG and the revised guidelines on the common country assessment (CCA) as well as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) were being issued. She pointed out that the CCA and the UNDAF processes provided a key opportunity to address absorptive capacity issues and to plan for national capacity-building. While noting the Fund's committed and active involvement in the UNDAF process, at both the headquarters and field levels, and its willingness to deploy the resources required to help to achieve results, the Executive Director observed that the exercise was demanding and time-consuming and UNFPA staff resources were about one quarter the size of its sister organizations. She concluded by paying tribute to the Administrator of UNDP for his commitment to United Nations reform and his leadership in chairing UNDG.

5. During the ensuing discussion, delegations focused mainly on the following issues: the quality of the report; the commitment to United Nations reform, including involvement in UNDAF and UNDG; the Fund's partnerships with other development partners; and the need to reduce the reporting burden on programme countries.

6. Several delegations commented favourably on the quality of the report and commended it for being analytical, concise and informative. Some delegations observed that the report should be more analytical and recommended that the model of the UNDP report should be followed, with a focus on providing lessons learned and recommendations. A number of delegations were pleased to note the common format of the UNFPA and UNDP reports and stated that it facilitated the discussion. While some delegations favoured having separate reports from UNFPA and UNDP, noting that that arrangement allowed the two organizations to express their particular points of view, other delegations supported the idea of a joint report to the Council and pointed out that a consolidated report would avoid repetition.

7. Several delegations commended the Fund's strong commitment to United Nations reform and the renewed emphasis given to it in the report and also commended the Fund's involvement in the UNDAF process. They noted that good progress was being made on United Nations reform within UNDG, notably in the area of UNDAF, and were pleased with the active and supportive role UNFPA had been carrying out in that regard. One delegation proposed submitting country programmes to the United Nations country team for analysis to ensure that the country programmes were coherent and in line with the UNDAF guidelines. Another delegation strongly supported the use of UNDAF as the long-term development instrument in post-emergency situations.

8. A number of delegations expressed views on the complementarity and/or overlap of the UNDAF and the CDF (see paragraphs __ to __ for that discussion).

9. One delegation, while recognizing the Fund's key role in designing programmes that assist countries in meeting the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), stated that UNFPA also had an important role to play in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women. The delegation added that the report should have highlighted results in the area of gender.

10. Several delegations underscored the importance of the Fund's partnerships with other United Nations entities and civil society organizations. While commending the Fund's collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other development partners, some delegations stated that collaboration with the United Nations regional commissions should be enhanced. Another delegation stated that the Fund should use the regional commissions to assist in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action and noted that the commissions could serve as substantive partners, contributing their technical expertise and knowledge of the region to operational activities. One delegation stated that the Executive Board should recommend more in-depth collaboration with the regional commissions. Another delegation noted that specific mention should have been made in the report of the Fund's collaboration and cooperation with the Commission on Population and Development, including in the ICPD+5 process. One delegation highlighted the importance of working with civil society, including grass-roots organizations, in programme implementation, and noted that such collaboration resulted in reduced costs, better follow-up and strengthened grass-roots communities. The delegation added that both his country and UNFPA had reaped benefits from such collaboration.

11. A number of delegations shared the Fund's concern, expressed in the report, that the reporting burden on programme countries should be reduced and reporting requirements should be simplified. One delegation, while noting that UNDG and UNDAF should not create undue burden on field offices, cautioned that coordination should not distract agencies from their original mandates.

12. One delegation, referring to paragraph 8 of the report, stated that it did not consider the establishment of data bases to be vital to the monitoring of conference goals. The delegation pointed out that the role that the Fund had been correctly playing went far beyond a restricted monitoring approach and focused on providing financial and technical resources to programme countries to assist them in achieving conference goals. The delegation agreed that the main constraint faced in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action was the lack of financial and human resources. The delegation added that it fully shared the conclusions expressed in paragraphs 39 and 40 regarding the gender implications and disproportionate impact on women of the privatization of social services and the globalization of the world economy.

13. The Executive Director thanked the delegations for their frank and constructive comments and questions. She acknowledged that the UNDP report was better than the Fund's report and assured the Board that for the following year UNFPA would produce a more analytical report with lessons learned included. She added that a joint report from UNDG would also be presented to the Council. She fully agreed with the observation that the Beijing Platform for Action was important for the work of the Fund, particularly as it included key areas and issues advanced by the ICPD Programme of Action. She noted that she would

continue to consult with the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women concerning the Beijing follow-up process. Also, regarding the general process of conference follow-up, the Executive Director proposed a much stronger utilization of the horizontal follow-up mechanisms, including, inter alia, the effective use and promotion of the outputs of the ACC Task Force on Basic Social Services for All.

14. She welcomed the suggestion that the country programmes should be reviewed by the country team and underscored that UNFPA had long been a proponent of such an approach, particularly as it helped to identify needs, gaps and overlaps while also providing opportunities to contribute to common goals. She added that the Fund also emphasized the fundamental importance of consultations with Governments, other development partners and stakeholders, including NGOs and other members of civil society. She affirmed that the Fund's country programme process was based on national ownership and leadership and reflected national priorities. She noted that the Fund had a very focused mandate and hoped that the UNDAF process would be one vehicle for development partners to give active support to ICPD goals. She agreed with the delegation that had underscored the importance of and the benefits deriving from working with grass-roots organizations and community groups and also agreed that it should be reflected in the report. She assured the Executive Board that the Fund had a very good collaborative relationship with the regional commissions and she concurred with the view that the role of the commissions in conference follow-up could be enhanced. She added that the Deputy Secretary-General was holding consultations on that and related matters.

15. The Executive Director underscored that multilateral grant assistance should be channelled through the United Nations system. Emphasizing the need to rationalize and streamline various coordination processes, she wondered if it was necessary to come up with yet another new process. She did not agree with the distinction drawn by the representative of the World Bank that the CDF was a development tool and the UNDAF was a planning tool. She stressed that UNDAF was definitely a development tool and that promoting development and building national capacity in programme countries was the raison d'être of the United Nations operational activities. On the relationship between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, in particular the World Bank, the Executive Director underscored the fundamental importance of Member States giving consistent instructions to their representatives at the United Nations and at the World Bank and concurred with the delegations who had expressed that view.

16. She agreed with the delegations that had underlined the need to reduce the reporting burden on programme countries. She noted that during her recent visit to Viet Nam, she had learned how an overwhelming reporting burden had been rationalized and streamlined through the work of a theme group on reproductive health, chaired by UNFPA, so that instead of providing separate reports on over 50 donor-supported projects, it would now be possible to report on the basis of a few selected indicators. Most importantly, the effort had enabled the Government to utilize the new reporting mechanisms for its own management of the programme.